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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, EUR/ERA AND EUR/AGS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2016

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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN SYRIA: AUSTRIAN RESPONSE

REF: STATE 41395

Classified By: ECONOMIC-POLITICAL COUNSELOR GREGORY E. PHILLIPS
REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) Pol Unit Chief conveyed reftel points on March 17 to MFA DAS-equivalent for Middle East affairs Wolfgang Lapuh. Lapuh said the timing of the demarche was excellent. The MFA had received an EU report (note: presumably either from the EU Commission or Council Secretariat) detailing the same incidents and essentially the same set of facts. The Austrian Presidency was now considering what action to take as a result. Lapuh indicated that the subject would likely figure in the EU Foreign Ministers' Council (GAERC) on March 20-21.

2. (C) We underlined the importance of moving beyond quiet diplomacy with the Syrians and going on record about some of the Syrian government's worst abuses. We emphasized the increasing USG concern about the number, size and type of the loans approved by the European Investment Bank (EIB) for the Syrian government. We noted that visits by EU Parliamentarians and Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos did not support a message to the Syrians that they were risking isolation by their behavior.

3. (C) COMMENT: The subject of Lebanon figures prominently in the EU Council agenda. EU Foreign Ministers will also meet with Lebanese PM Fouad Siniora to discuss the development of EU-Lebanon relations. The unfinished investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese PM Hariri and Syrian influence in Lebanon will likely be an important item in these discussions.
McCaw